



Highlights of [GAO-07-833T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) plays a key role in leading and coordinating—with stakeholders in the federal, state, local, and private sectors—the nation's homeland security efforts. GAO has conducted numerous reviews of DHS management functions as well as programs including transportation and border security, immigration enforcement and service delivery, and disaster preparation and response. This testimony addresses:

- why GAO designated DHS's implementation and transformation as a high-risk area,
- specific management challenges that DHS continues to face,
- examples of the program challenges that DHS faces, and
- actions DHS should take to strengthen its implementation and transformation efforts.

What GAO Recommends

While this testimony contains no new recommendations, GAO has made numerous prior recommendations to DHS in reports addressing the issues identified in this statement. DHS generally concurred with these recommendations; however it is not clear to what extent these recommendations are being implemented.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-833T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Norman Rabkin at (202) 512-8777 or rabkinn@gao.gov or Bernice Steinhardt, at 202-512-6806 or steinhardtb@gao.gov

HOMELAND SECURITY

Management and Programmatic Challenges Facing the Department of Homeland Security

What GAO Found

GAO designated implementing and transforming DHS as high risk in 2003 because DHS had to transform and integrate 22 agencies—several with existing program and management challenges—into one department, and failure to effectively address its challenges could have serious consequences for our homeland security. Despite some progress, this transformation remains high risk.

Managing the transformation of an organization of the size and complexity of DHS requires comprehensive planning and integration of key management functions that will likely span a number of years. DHS has made some progress in these areas, but much additional work is required to help ensure sustainable success. DHS has also issued guidance and plans to assist management integration on a function by function basis, but lacks a comprehensive integration strategy with overall goals, a timeline, appropriate responsibility and accountability determinations, and a dedicated team to support its efforts. The latest independent audit of DHS's financial statements showed that its financial management systems still do not conform to federal requirements. DHS has also not institutionalized an effective strategic framework for information management, and its human capital and acquisition systems require further attention to ensure that DHS allocates resources economically, effectively, ethically, and equitably.

Since GAO's 2007 high-risk update, DHS has continued to strengthen program activities but still faces a range of programmatic and partnering challenges. To help ensure its missions are achieved, DHS must overcome continued challenges related to such issues as cargo, transportation, and border security; systematic visitor tracking; efforts to combat the employment of illegal aliens; and outdated Coast Guard asset capabilities. Further, DHS and the Federal Emergency Management Agency need to continue to develop clearly defined leadership roles and responsibilities; necessary disaster response capabilities; accountability systems to provide effective services while protecting against waste, fraud, and abuse; and the ability to conduct advance contracting for emergency response goods, supplies, and services.

DHS has not produced a final corrective action plan specifying how it will address its many management challenges. Such a plan should define the root causes of known problems, identify effective solutions, have management support, and provide for substantially completing corrective measures in the near term. It should also include performance metrics and milestones, as well as mechanisms to monitor progress. It will also be important for DHS to become more transparent and minimize recurring delays in providing access to information on its programs and operations so that Congress, GAO, and others can independently assess its efforts. DHS may require a chief management official, with sufficient authority, dedicated to the overall transformation process to help ensure sustainable success over time.